A SERMON

Preached before the

KING

AT

White - Hall,

October 17. 1675.

By *MILES BARNE* Fellow of St. *Peter's* College in *Cambridge*, and Chaplain in Ordinary to His MAJESTY.

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2 Pet. chap. 3. ver. 16.——

In which are ſome things hard to be Underſtood, which they that are unlearned, and unſtable, Wreſt, as they do alſo the other Scriptures, unto their own Deſtruction.

THe *clearneſs of Scripture, in all points neceſſary to Salvation, to all ſuch as ſincerely endeavour to believe, and find out the True Senſe thereof:* as it is a *principle* which ſuits very well with the nature and deſigne of a Rule; with the juſtice and goodneſs of God in propounding it as ſuch; and hath been urged with ſome ſucceſs againſt thoſe, who plead a neceſſity of having One Supream infallible Judge, to decide and determine all Controverſies, which ſhall happen to ariſe concerning that Faith which was once deliver'd to

the Saints: Whoſe Deciſions and Determinations, ſay they, ought to be Receiv'd, by all the Sons of the Church [for as much as the Church is the ſame in all Ages] with equal Aſſent and Veneration with thoſe of the Apoſtles: And this to be the only ſure way, to keep the *Unity of the Faith*, in *the Bond of Peace*.

Whereby on the other hand 'tis ſaid, New *Articles* of *Faith* may be dayly impoſed; the *Doctrines* of men, paſs for the *Commandments of God*; and humane *Inventions*, receive the ſtamp, of Divine *Authority*; whereby men ſeem precluded the genuine methods, of coming to the Knowledge of the Truth, and thoſe Precepts of of *ſearching* the *Scriptures*, *ſeeking* the *Kingdom* of Heaven, *trying* the *Spirits*, are rendred Ineffectual; whereby men are ſo far from being able to give an *account* of their *Faith*, that their *Underſtandings* are enſlav'd by a principle of *blind Obedience*; ſo far from being led into the wayes of Religion,

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by the *cords of men*, that they ſeem rather to be driven like Beaſts, and acted like Puppets, as 'tis phras'd by a late Author.

As this *Doctrine* of the *clearneſs of Scripture*, hath prov'd ſucceſsful to the beating down the pretences to an abſolute *Infallibility*, and uncontroulable ſoveraignty over the Conſciences of men: ſo on the other hand hath it mightily embolden'd the *Patrons of Liberty*, not only to deſpiſe their Eccleſiaſtical Superiors, to throw off all obedience to Chriſts Miniſters; [Whom He, notwithſtanding, a little before his Return to his Fathers Court, for the further negotiating, and advancing the affairs of His Church, Anointed and Ordain'd to perform the Apoſtolical Offices, of *Preaching* the *Goſpel*; *Remitting Sins*; *Inflicting Cenſures*; Miniſterially *conferring the Holy Ghoſt*; *Deciding Controverſies*, and *Adminiſtring the Sacraments* in his ſtead, here on earth till his ſecond coming] but likewiſe to invade their Function, uſurp their Sacred Call-

Calling; especially that part of it which consists in Preaching and Expounding the Word.

For, say they, since 'tis confess'd, the Scriptures are sufficiently clear, to all unprejudiced minds, such as are free, from the clogs of Passion and Interest; Why should these pretended *Ministers of Christ* take so much upon them? Are not all the *Congregation Holy, and Learned, as well as they*? Are they the only *Temples of the Holy Ghost*? And doth the *Spirit of Propheſie reside* solely in their Breasts?

During the Dispensation of *Moses*, 'tis confess'd, there was a necessity of an *Aaron*; all along under the legal œconomy, the Priests Lips did preserve Knowledge; and likewise during the raign of the Prophets, there was an appropriate Ministry. But the case is quite different under the Gospel, God having made clearer discoveries of himself, and poured out more liberally of his Spirit, upon all Flesh. The sense of the Law that

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was Doubtful, Typical and Myſterious; the Prophecies were induſtriouſly couch'd under dark Parables, and deliver'd in obſcure ſayings. But then the light, the glorious light of the Goſpel, as 'twas univerſal, 'twas likewiſe ſo clear, that any one who runs may read. Why then ſhould we not aſſert that *Liberty* wherewith Chriſt hath made us free? and ſince we have a Command, to work out our own Salvation, Why ſhould we pin our Faith upon other mens ſleeves?

Thus theſe men, under the goodly Pretences, of *Chriſtian Liberty*, become enſlav'd to ſpiritual pride and conceitedneſs; plead the Prerogative of the Goſpel, in prejudice of Chriſts own Embaſſadors; urge, for their own private Conceptions, clearneſs of Scripture, to their own Confuſion; and pry ſo long into the Doctrines of Theology, till at length they light on thoſe *hidden Myſteries*, which they being *Unlearned* and *Unſtable*, Wreſt, unto their own Deſtruction. The way thus prepar'd, my Text yet leads me into theſe following Conſiderations. 1. *That*

1. *That the clearneſs of Scripture doth no wayes leſſen the Authority, or take away the Neceſſity of Spiritual Guides.*

2. *That though the Scriptures be clear in themſelves, yet private men, abandoning* their *Lawful Guides, and following their own Corrupt Fancies, may deprave and diſtort them to their own Deſtruction.*

3. *That for preventing Miſtakes from riſing, and ſuppreſſing Errors when riſen, 'tis the duty of Private men to ſubmit their Judgements in matters of Religion, to the Determinations of thoſe whom God hath conſtituted to be their Spiritual Guides and Governours; unleſs it manifeſtly appear, that ſuch Determinations are contrary to Gods Word.*

I. I begin with the Firſt, *That the Clearneſs of Scripture*, &c. For, if the Scriptures be ſo Clear, and Self-evident, as is pretended, then may men with greater ſecurity rely on the Directions of their *Guides*; and they have the leſs Reaſon to ſuſpect their Conduct in thoſe things, wherein they themſelves being

being Judges, they cannot be miſtaken, if they ſincerely attend them; the clearneſs of the Law is ſo far from leſſening the Authority, that it rather conciliates reverence to the Judge. The Profeſſion of Phyſick doth not therefore become uſeleſs, becauſe the Aphoriſms of *Hippocrates*, contain the neceſſary Rules for Health; and may be underſtood by thoſe who are capacitated, and will take the pains to do it.

The Scriptures they do clearly contain the *Doctrines of Salvation*: And one way, whereby Chriſt prov'd himſelf the true Meſſias, was by anſwering that Character, the Prophets had given of Him, that the Poor ſhould have the Goſpel Preached unto them, *i. e.* Men as of ſmall Capacities, and leſs Eſtates ſo of humble and teachable Diſpoſitions; men who were Poor in Spirit, as well as in Fortune: And the perfection of the *Chriſtian Law* conſiſts in this, that therein God hath preſcribed a reaſonable ſervice. The Rules of Life, which are therein laid

down, are not so much the product of absolute power, and soveraignty; as the Result of infinite Mercy and Goodness. And these His Attributes led Him to consult the wants, and commiserate the Necessities of the meanest of Mankind: And therefore, as when He took upon Him to deliver Man, He did not abhor the Virgins Womb; and that He might become a Sacrifice for Sin, was content to be dis-array'd of His own Eternal Glory, to take upon Him the Form of a Servant, and to humble Himself to the Death, the shameful Death of the Cross: so likewise when He took upon Him the Office of a *Teacher*, by a wonderful Condescent, He accommodated His *Doctrines* to the reason, & humane Affections of His Auditors. His Laws obtain'd as much by their suitableness to our natures, as the Authority of the Speaker. When He preach'd His *Divine Sermon* to the Multitude, He did not Amuse them, with Mystical Theology, or torture their Understandings with profound Subtilties;

tilties; but as He was the *Brightneſs of His Fathers Glory*, and the *expreſs Image of His Perſon*; ſo He declar'd the Law of God, in a moſt Plain and Perſpicuous manner.

Mahomet indeed, that grand Impoſtor, was well Advis'd, to Pen his Alcoran in ſwelling Words, and myſtical Phraſes; and as in ſome things to Reſtrain, ſo in others to Indulge the ſenſual Appetite: For by this Stratagem, that ſottiſh People with whom he had to do, were content to part with their natural Right, to gain an Unlawful Freedom, and to Admire what they were never like to Underſtand.

But our new and perfect *Law giver Chriſt Jeſus*, having no other deſign but the Salvation of Souls, and being every way Adorn'd for ſo noble a Purpoſe; though He made the *Gate Narrow*, and the *Path Strait*; yet He hath Promiſed it ſhall be Open'd to all that Knock; and none, unleſs Wilfully, need Miſtake the VVay which leads to Eternal Life.

But then, becauſe He knew, there was no *Rule* ſo plain, but it might be *Miſtaken*; no *Precept* ſo clear, but it might be *Perverted*; no *Doctrine* ſo pure, but it might be *Corrupted*: Becauſe He foreſaw there would ariſe falſe Prophets, and falſe Teachers, whoſe buſineſs it would be to Seduce the *Ignorant*, and Debauch the *Credulous*: Becauſe He foreſaw a perpetual Succeſſion of *Gnoſticks*, who, in all Ages, would ſet up the *Dagon* of their own laſcivious Fancies, in oppoſition to the *Ark* of His Covenant; and be ſo audacious, as even to confront Divine Revelations, with carnal reaſoning: therefore to obviate, and prevent, the miſchiefs of ſuch *grievous Wolves*; before He took His Journey into his far Country, out of a tender care of that *Flock*, which He had purchas'd with his Blood, He appointed *Overſeers*, and *Paſtors* of His *Flock*; committed to them, and them only, the care of *Feeding* his *Flock*; amplified their *Commiſſion* with the like *Authority*, which he had receiv'd from his Father;

ther; promis'd to be with them unto the End of the World; and to assist them with that *Spirit*, which should guide them into all Truth.

If then the Scriptures be so Clear, as to be understood even by the *Multitude*, then much more by the *Disciples in general*: If by the Disciples in general, much more by the *College* of the *Apostles*, who were His special Favourites, and of his Cabinet-Council: If the Nations, to whom these Ministers in Chief, and Plenepotentiaries for Christ, made known the *Will* of *God*, were throughly instructed for the Kingdom of Heaven; then much more both They, and Their Successors, upon whom they, in obedience to their Masters Command, conferr'd the same Pastoral power which they had receiv'd from Him.

The Clearness then of Scripture, cannot reasonably be urg'd, in Prejudice of *Christs Ministers*; for, whatsoever is from hence alledg'd, in favour of the *People*, the advantage

tage will be ſtill greater on their ſide. Thus hath God promis'd the Aſſiſtance of his Spirit to all private men, who ſincerely endeavour to find out the Truth; then much leſs will He be wanting to the Governors of his Church, to whom He hath committed the care of the Souls of thoſe private men, and given power even to confer the Holy Ghoſt. Are the Scriptures clear to them, much more to thoſe, whom the Son of God hath ſignaliz'd, and ſet apart for the Lights of the World? *Two Things* are uſually brought to hinder this Procedure: *Either, that thoſe Promiſes of Aſſiſtance were made only to the Apoſtles; or elſe that they depend on the conditioned Righteouſneſs of Men.* Where, by the way, it may be Obſerv'd, that by the Firſt of theſe, the Claim of the People is utterly cut off; and by the Second, they have as ſmall Advantage.

But they who argue thus, might do well to conſider, that this Objection may ſtrike at the very *Foundation of the Faith.* For, if thoſe

those promises of Assistance, which Christ made to His Church be Hypothecal; if they depend on the Performance of Men, then may the *Foundation Totter*, the *Gates of Hell prevail*, *Christianity decay*, and the *Gospel* it self be lost out of the World, before the End thereof, notwithstanding all Christs fair Promises to the Contrary. If they had been confin'd only to the Apostles, its *Christian Religion* had not long surviv'd the Author; every Martyrdom of an Apostle, had pull'd down a Pillar of the Church, and by consequence, the whole Fabrick must have fallen to the ground in the very first Century of our Lord.

Happy indeed had it been for Christendom, that the Imperiousness of some Modern Bishops of *Rome* had not brought an Odium, though unjustly, upon Episcopacy in general, that their too much Lording it over the Flock, had not given Advantage to the Enemies of *Church-Authority*, and their Challenging to themselves at least an indi-

indirect Power in Temporals, had not Alarm'd the Kings of the Earth, to ſtand up, and take Counſel how they might Deſtroy ſo dangerous an *Uſurpation* of the pretended Vicegerent of the *Lords Anointed.*

Happy had it been, if for the Support of their Secular Greatneſs, they had not Wreſted the Scriptures to countenance ſuch *Doctrines*, as have no clear and ſolid foundation therein; and that under pretence of making the *Church* all Glorious Within, Her Governours all Triumphant Without, they had not defac'd Her Innocent *Beauty*, and made Her *Militant* in the worſt of Senſes.

However, they can no way be Excuſed, who think they can never be Secure from *Papal Supremacy*, but by Demoliſhing the *Evangelical Hierarchy*, and introducing a Presbyterial *Parity* into the *Catholick Church*; and to avoid the Neceſſity of having an Infallible Judge, leaving every private prepoſſeſſed Fancy to the *Perſpicuity*

of

of Scripture, whereby men are often bewildred in a Labyrinth of Errors, ſeduc'd into thoſe by-paths which lead to the *Pit* of *Deſtruction:* For, notwithſtanding that Beam of Divine Light, which ſhines ſo Bright in the Scriptures, it ſeems ſome men have Eyes either ſo weak as to be dazled at the ſight of it, or elſe ſo blind with Pride or Malice, as not to perceive it: For, St. *Peter* tells us, there are in the Scriptures, ſome things hard to be Underſtood, which unlearned and unſtable men Wreſt, unto their own Deſtruction: And therefore the Unlearned ſhould do well to conſult their Teachers; the Unſtable, thoſe that are ſound in the Faith; which brings me to my ſecond general Conſideration. *That though the Scriptures be clear in themſelves, yet Private men, abandoning their Guides, and following their own corrupt Fancies, may deprave and diſtort them to their own deſtruction.*

Who thoſe Wreſters were, or what thoſe διυσνόητα are, wherewith St. *Peter* chargeth

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geth the Epiſtles of His beloved Brother *Paul*, I ſhall not ſtrictly enquire; the Apoſtle having paſs'd them over in a profound ſilence, it will be difficult at this diſtance of time exactly to define; yet 'tis not improbable, that either the *Gnoſtick*, or *Cerinthian Hereticks*, were here chiefly aim'd at, who upon a miſtake of ſome Predictions, became the Founders of a Temporal Dominion of Chriſt after His Reſurrection; wherein His Followers in their New *Jeruſalem*, ſhould wallow in ſenſual Luſts and Pleaſures, ſpend the ſpace of a Thouſand Years, as in a Nuptial Feſtivity, and enjoy the all that is in the World; the Luſts of the Fleſh, the Luſts of the Eye, and the Pride of Life, in as ample and exquiſite a manner, as the moſt Epicurean ſoul could effect or covet: A fancy, in its firſt original, meerly Jewiſh; afterwards entertain'd by ſome Judaizing Chriſtians; and finally, rather rectified than abandon'd, by ſome of the Fathers in the Primitive times. And if thoſe ſublime Wits,

who

who had all the Learning which either *Jeru-ſalem*, *Athens*, or *Rome*, could Boaſt, were never leſs Miſtaken in their Expoſitions, of ſome abſtruſe Texts of Scripture [whilſt they deliver'd their Opinions but as private Doctors] what wonder if the unlearned, and unſtable, Wreſt, them to their own Deſtruction?

That they have, *de facto*, done this, is manifeſt, ſince 'twill be hard to inſtance in any one *Century*, which is not either chargeable with new Hereſies, or the reviving and improving of Old. And the moſt extravagant Opinions, which ever yet ſaw the light, have ſtill ſhrouded themſelves under the *Patronage of Holy Writ*. What ſhall we ſay then, ſhall we condemn the Scriptures of Sin? Shall we ſay, That the Scriptures are of themſelves either productive of Error, or not a ſufficient ſtore-houſe of Truth? God forbid. The Scriptures are Holy, Juſt, and Good, but private men Wreſt them to their own Deſtruction. And this they do, firſt,

By their *Ignorance*; Secondly, By their *Inſtability.*

I. Firſt, by their *Ignorance*: where it will be preſently Objected, that Ignorance is ſo far from being a cauſe of Error, or impiety, that, in a ſober ſence, 'tis truly the Mother of Devotion. The Wiſdom of this World, is given in by *Tertullian*, as the prime Cauſe of Hereſie; None were greater Tormentors of the Scriptures than the Phyloſophers; for which Reaſon they are Branded by the ſame Author, with the Title of Arch-Hereticks: Particularly the *Valentinian Hereſie*, concerning the portentous production of the Gods, comes from the *Platoniſts*; *Marcious Unconcern'd, and Lazy God*, was firſt ſet up by the *Stoicks*; the mortality of the Soul was the Doctrine of the *Epicureans*; the Impoſſibility of the *Reſurrection* of the Fleſh, of the whole ſtream of Phyloſophers.

The Apoſtles tells us, Not many Mighty, not many Wiſe, not many Noble, were Choſen:

Choſen: Cautions his Proſelytes againſt Philoſophy and vain Deceit, and concludes the Wiſdom of this World, Fooliſhneſs with God. Wherefore, by Ἀμαθεῖς, Vnlearned, in this place, we are not to underſtand *Ideots*, and thoſe who never knew Letters; but we muſt underſtand thoſe who will not be Inſtructed by the *Maſters of Divine Wiſdom*, the *Nolentes diſcere*, thoſe who refuſe to hear the *Church of the Living God, which alone is the Pillar and Foundation of Truth.* And ſo their Learning, like *Julians*, only qualifies them, to deride the Doctrines of a Crucified God, and by their Wiſdom they become the more formidable Enemies of Chriſt's Kingdom.

Thus, if *Lucifer*, the Son of the Morning, fall from his Allegiance, whole *Legions* of the Heavenly Hoſt are involv'd in the Rebellion. That Hereſie ſpreads like the Contagion of a Leproſy, which hath an *Arrius* for its Founder, and a *Conſtantius* for its Promoter: And the *Mahumetan* Religion owes

owes as well its monſtrous Birth, as its fatal Encreaſe to the Malice and Cunning of an *Apoſtate Jew*, and a *Renegado Chriſtian*. And to give but one inſtance more, but of a far more Modern Date, and therefore of more Dangerous conſequence; That unhappy man *Socinus*, a perſon otherwiſe of ſingular Wit and Learning; but being in this ſenſe unlearned, *i. e.* Having entertain'd ſo ſlender a Notion of the Church, as to date a general Defection from the very Deaths of the Apoſtles; upon this Perſwaſion, thought it not *Robbery*, to make himſelf equal to the moſt *Oecumenical Councils*, to contradict the moſt receiv'd *Doctrines* of the Church; and from this Contempt of his Mother, to proceed to that daring pitch of Impiety, as to deny even the Lord that Bought him: ſo dangerous is it for private men, to rely ſolely upon the perſpicuity of Scripture, or to meaſure the ὑπόστασις of the Incarnation of the Godhead, his Conſubſtantiality with the Father, by the ſcantling of Hu-

Humane Reaſon. *Cedat curioſitas fidei, gloria ſaluti*, was the Advice of as great a Wit as any Age hath bred. Our Curioſity muſt give place to our Faith; the thirſt of Temporal Glory, to the benefits of Eternal Salvation.

'Tis true, by our Reaſon, we are firſt diſpos'd to be Chriſtians; for no Creature, beneath the Rational, is capable of Divine Revelation; but when once we have given up our Names to Chriſt, 'tis by our Faith we are Saved: but if we Aſſent to no Doctrines, but ſuch as our Reaſon fully Comprehends, this is no longer Faith, but Science; and ſo we may continue Infidells, whilſt we go under the Notion of Chriſtians.

And, ſince We live in ſuch a Knowing Age, wherein all *captivating the Underſtanding*, though it be to the *Obedience of Faith*, is made the ſubject of Grievance and Complaint: And that we have to deal with men of ſuch a ſceptical Genius, as that they,

they do not only enquire into the Grounds and Reaſons of our Faith, but moreover deny our very *Creed*; with whom a *Treatiſe of Humane Reaſon* is of more Force, than the *Revelation of St. John the Divine.* To the Conſideration of theſe Men, I offer *Two Things* which I judge moſt proper.

I. Firſt, the Anſwer which *Origen* made to *Celſus*, when 'twas objected by that *Calumniator* againſt the Chriſtians, that their Religion was built on a very ſandy Foundation, which durſt not undergo the Teſt of Reaſon, but commanded its Converts not to Examine, but Believe, and their Faith ſhould Save them. In part he owns the Objection, but wiſely Retorts it upon his Adverſary, by telling him, that the *Philoſophers* were the greateſt *Dictators* in the World: Witneſs the *Ipſe dixit* of *Phythagoras*, that their Syſtems contain'd ſome ſuch ſecret *Dogmata*, which their Diſciples ſwallowed ſolely upon the Credit of their Maſters. And if the Maſters of the Wiſdom of this

this World [which is either *Fooliſhneſs*, or at beſt, but *Science, falſly ſo called*] required ſo great ſubmiſſion from their Scholars, how much greater is to be given to thoſe Doctrines which are contain'd in the Writings of the Evangeliſts and Apoſtles, who were *Taught of God, and ſpake as they were inſpired by the Holy Ghoſt*?

II. Secondly, I urge the Authority of my Lord *Bacon*, whoſe, if any, me thinks ſhould be admitted by theſe *Virtuoſi in Religion*; The Divine Prerogative, ſaith he, extends it ſelf to the Whole Man; and requires not only *Obedience* from our Wills, but *Submiſſion* from our Underſtandings. And therefore, as we are bound to Obey the Divine Law, though our Wills reluct never ſo much againſt it; ſo are we obliged to believe whatſoever God hath Reveal'd, though never ſo improbable to our underſtandings: For if we believe no more than what we can demonſtrate to be true, we do not believe the *Truth* deliver'd for the *Au-*

thors ſake, but the *Author* for the *Truths* ſake; and ſo we pay no more Reſpect to the Oracles of God, than we do to the Writings of Men, though never ſo much Suſpected by us. The Faith which Juſtified *Abraham*, was converſant in a matter incredible to Reaſon: And therefore, the higher the *Myſteries of Religion* are above our Reaſon, the greater is the exerciſe and tryumph of our Faith, & the Honour done unto God in Believing. To conclude this Point, Great is the uſe of *Reaſon* in *Religion*, both as to the manner of interpreting the Scriptures, & the deducing true conſequences, and wholeſome concluſions from thence; and if it be wholly ſuppreſs'd, our Religion will degenerate into Superſtition; we ſhall be ſo far from paying God a *Reaſonable Service*, that we ſhall offer Him the *Sacrifice of Fools*. But then it muſt be kept to a due temper; for, if be not managed by prudent *Guides*, 'tis apt to grow Wild, and Extravagant, to hurry us on to a Belief of the *Fowleſt Impoſtures*, to a Practiſe of

of the *Grosseſt Impieties*, which either the prevalency of the World, the domineering enmity of the Fleſh, or the implacable malice of Satan, can propound to be Believed or Practis'd.

II. The ſecond Reaſon of Private Mens falling into Error, is their *Inſtability* in not adhering to their Guides; but forſaking them to go aſtray in the intricate paths of Error and Deceit. Hereſie being nothing elſe but an Exciſion from, and Diſobedience to the Church in points of *Faith*. And therefore the Apoſtle pronounceth an Heretick *Self-Condemned*; one who hath Wantonly choſen to himſelf thoſe Opinions: for an Obſtinate Defence whereof, after full and plain means of Conviction, he juſtly falls under the Cenſures of the Church, is Excommunicated the Aſſembly of the Saints; & ſo without *Repentance* & *Reconciliation* continues in a very dangerous eſtate, if that of *Heathens* and *Publicans* be acknowledg'd ſuch.

Not in Vain then are thoſe frequent *Cau-*

tions againſt Falling Away, thoſe repeated *Admonitions* to Perſeverance, thoſe earneſt *Exhortations* to hold faſt the Profeſſion, and contend for the Faith which was once Deliver'd; thoſe ſo much inculcated *Commands* of Obeying thoſe who are ſet Over us in the Lord, Heb. 13. v. 7. *Remember them which have the Rule over you, who have ſpoken unto you the Word of God, whoſe Faith follow.* Ver. 17. *Obey them that have the Rule over you, and ſubmit your ſelves, for they Watch for your Souls.* For in Vain may thoſe men commit themſelves to the immediate Aſſiſtance of God, who neglect to hear his *Guides*; and violate His Commandments, in hopes to procure His help & favour: For, from that very moment of time, they ceaſe to be Members of the *Holy Catholick Church*, they are become *Out-lawries* in a *Goſpel-ſenſe*, they have loſt the *Protection* of the *Heavenly King*, and they lay under the *Deprivation* of the benefits belonging to the Subjects of that *Jeruſalem* which is Above.

And

And what wonder, if being in this forlorn condition the Tempter take his advantage, lead them into the Wilderneſs, and there preſent to their diſturb'd fancies falſe ſchemes of Religion, ſuggeſt unworthy apprehenſions of God; and whatſoever is by him thus ſuggeſted, is by them miſtaken for new light and holy inſpirations.

And becauſe this ſpirit of deluſion dares put forth, among Chriſtians, no Doctrines but ſuch as pretend to be founded on the *Scriptures:* to this purpoſe they are *wreſted and tortur'd,* their *ſcope* is miſtaken, their *ſenſe* abuſed, their *Periods* miſerably mangled, their whole *deſign* perverted to countenance every *Wild Opinion,* which either a *capricious fancy can imagine,* or a *Malicious Wit invent.* And from hence it comes to paſs, that we have as many ſeveral ſorts of Chriſtians as there are different humours or Intereſts of men; & the Goſpel with *St. Paul,* though in a quite contrary ſenſe, is become all things unto all men.

And

And having made thus bold with the *Scriptures*, it cannot be expected that they ſhould deal more modeſtly with any authority inferior to that; the moſt ancient Traditions muſt now give place to new diſcoveries. The Conſent of the Catholick Apoſtolick Church be borne down by the *Dictates* of a private, I might ſay, familiar ſpirit. Whereas there is all the reaſon in the World to believe that the Apoſtles beſt knew the mind of their Maſter, that they faithfully & fully communicated their knowledge to their ſucceſſors,& ſo by certain ſteps and degrees we may arrive at this fundamental truth. *That as the Church is the moſt faithfull Keeper*, ſo the moſt *authentick Expoſitor of Scripture.* Which fairly uſhers in my third and laſt Conſideration. *That for the preventing Miſtakes from Riſing, and ſuppreſſing Errors when Riſen, 'Tis the duty of Private Men to ſubmit their Judgements, in matters of Religion, to the Determinations of thoſe whom God hath Conſtituted to be their*

Spiritual

Spiritual Guides and Governours; Unleſs it manifeſtly Appear, that ſuch Determinations are contrary to Gods Word. And this I ſhall aſſert very briefly both from the qualifications of the Perſons who are appointed to Rule in the Church, and the Reaſon of the thing.

I. And that which firſt entitles the *Governors* of the Church to a *ſuperiority* over their *Subjects*, is that ſpecial *Ordination and Comiſſion*, which they have receiv'd from Chriſt, to inſtruct the World in all neceſſary Truths, and that Charge which he hath laid upon others to obey them. If any one liſteth to ſee their *Commiſſion*, He may find it recorded in any of the four Evangeliſts. I ſhall exhibit it, as 'tis exemplified 28 *Mat.* 18, 19, 20. Verſes. *And Jeſus came and ſpake unto them, ſaying, All power is given, to me in Heaven, and Earth: Go ye therefore, and Teach all Nations, Teaching them to obſerve all things whatſoever I have Commanded you: And lo, I am with You alwayes unto*

to the end of the World. In which words there are these Three Things considerable: 1. That Christ commission'd His Disciples immediately after He had proclaim'd Himself Omnipotent. 2. That this Commission implies it to be Christs Will, that all Nations of the World should Obey them. 3. That He promised to be with Them and their Successors, unto the end of the World. And there cannot be a fuller instance, of the Perverseness of some Men, who to evacuate and overthrow the Authority of the present Church, will needs confine συντέλια τῦ αἰῶνος to some period of time, short of the final *dissolution* of all things, when time shall be swallow'd up of *Eternity*; if not contrary to the Grammatical sense of the Word, yet at least to the design of the Promise, and the nature of the Thing.

Which of the Embassadors of earthly Potentates ever received so ample a commission? the Person commissioning was Omnipotent. The Commission was universal in

in reſpect of Perſons, time and place; 'twas directed to all the Nations, and to continue throughout all the Ages of the World, and for the Execution of it they were empowr'd from Above; whereſoever they came, they conſtituted a Spiritual Government, and they had full power to Enact ſuch Laws as they thought tended to the Advancement of their *Maſters Kingdom*; and they did with *Authority*, and not by way of Counſel only, as ſome would have, determine ſuch Controverſies as aroſe, *It ſeemed good to the Holy Ghoſt, and to Us.*

All along their Spiritual progreſs, if any City refus'd to receive Them, or their *Doctrine*, they ſhook off the Duſt of their Feet againſt it, as a dire Preſage of ſome enſuing Judgment, as the next words manifeſtly declare; *Verily I ſay unto you, it ſhall be more tollerable for* Sodom *and* Gomorrah *in the day of Judgement, than for that City.* Wretched City! how has thy Diſobedience aſcertain'd, and aggrandiz'd thy Ruine.

The Lewd Inhabitants of *Sodom* and *Gomorrah* ſhall find more Favour in the day of Judgement, than thy Citizens. Moſt true it is, their Power was purely Spiritual: Chriſt, the Prince of Peace, did not Commiſſion Generals to deſtroy, but ſent forth Apoſtles to Convert the Nations, by declaring His Laws, & denouncing His Judgments. But then they had no coercive power of the Sword, which God hath given to Magiſtrates, to inflict the Judgments which they denounc'd. But as they, becauſe living under Heathen Powers, left the Event of their Spiritual *Cenſures* ſolely to Divine Vengeance, [which they who eſcap'd in this world, were ſure to meet with in the next]; ſo is it ſtill, unleſs *Kings* are graciouſly pleaſed to ſhew themſelves *Nurſing Fathers to the Church*, to enforce Spiritual Cenſures, by Corporal Penalties, and adjudge thoſe Unworthy the Protection of the Laws of the Realm, who are juſtly depriv'd of the Benefits of the Church. By all which, it appears,

pears, that the Church is ſomething elſe, than a *Chriſtian Common-wealth*, ſince there was a Church before the Common-wealth became Chriſtian; and neither the *Leviathan*, nor any of his Diſciples, hath yet been able to ſhew, how, or when the Church forfeited Her antecedent Right: And that though the Governours thereof may challenge to themſelves a Power diſtinct, yet no wayes Oppoſite to the Civil; The *Shield of Faith*, doth not Claſh with the *Sword of Juſtice*. And maugre the deſignes of thoſe, who have Evil will at *Sion*, this is not to erect *Imperium in imperio*, much leſs to ſet the *Mitre* above the *Crown*: Since whatſoever Power, is here challeng'd as of Divine Right, is purely Spiritual, exercis'd to Spiritual ends and purpoſes; ſo far from interfering with the *Civil*, from Abſolving men from that Obedience, which is indiſpenſably due thereunto; that whereſoever it takes place, it abates nothing of that natural Right which the Magiſtrate had in the Af-

fairs of Religion: Yet herein it will appear, that the Wisdom of the despised King of the *Jews*, did far surmount all the Policies of the world; in that he hath so interwoven the concerns of His *Church*, with the interest of the *State*, that at the same time any man shall dare to become an *Enemy to his Kingdom*, he must cease to be a *Friend to Cæsars*.

II. The reasonableness of this Submission, will appear from those promises of Assistance, which Christ hath made to them, but not to others without them; much less to others against them: And those are *Illumination*, *Direction* and *Power*. Illumination, in things Obscure; Direction, in things Difficult; Power, to Encounter, and overcome all Opposition.

And this may be one Reason, why *Christ* did not Arm his Disciples with a Temporal Sword; for, certainly He, who had all Power given Him in Heaven, and on Earth, might have done it if He had pleas'd, because He furnish'd

niſh'd them with ſuch *Extraordinary Virtues*, as did abundantly ſupply the Defect of that. Thus they who could Raiſe the *Dead* from the *Grave*, needed no other Argument to gain the *Living*. They who could convince the Conſciences, captivate the Underſtandings, beat down the Imaginations, and conquer the Affections of their Adverſaries, needed no Sword, nor Spear, nor any of the Bloody Engines of War, to make themſelves Maſters of the Field.

Now the ſame *Spirit*, though not in the ſame *Meaſure*, doth ſtill reſide in the Governors of the *Church*: though they do not equalize the Apoſtles in Working of Miracles, diverſities of Languages, extent of Juriſdiction; though they have not, as they had, the whole World for their Dioceſs; yet are they ſtill *Biſhops of Souls; Paſtors, and Doctors for the Conſummation of the Saints, for the Edifying of the Body of Chriſt, till we all come in the Unity of the Faith, unto a perfect man in Chriſt Jeſus*. Either then let Private men

ſub-

ſubmit to their Spiritual Governours; exerciſing their *Commiſſion* according to Gods Word; or elſe let them warrant their Diſſent with greater, at leaſt equal Atteſtations of the Divine Favour; and then there will be no great fear, of any danger ariſing from Diſſenting Brethren.

III. The reaſonableneſs of this Submiſſion will appear, from their ſtudy and learning in Divine Matters, and from the far leſs knowledge, and ordinary capacity in others. The Apoſtles, they had their Knowledge of Divine things, either from a conſtant and familiar converſe with their Maſter, or elſe from that plentiful effuſion of the Holy Ghoſt, which He vouchſav'd them, immediately upon His Reſtauration to His Heavenly Kingdom.

That which was thus Wonderfully beſtowed upon them, their Succeſſors are forc'd to acquire, by *hard Study*, *great Induſtry*, *frequent* and *fervent Addreſs* to the *Fountain of Wiſdom*. For, not only the

Know-

Knowledge of Languages, a *calmneſs of Mind*, neither ruffled with the ſtorms of Paſſion, nor diſtracted with the Cares of the World; but likewiſe a *peircing Judgment*, to diſtinguiſh between the Literal and Figurative ſenſe, to weigh the ſcope and coherence of things, to compare one place with another, to Illuſtrate obſcure Texts, by thoſe which are more plain, to conſult, and find out the ſenſe of Antiquity, is required to a right underſtanding of the Scriptures: For, they do not only contain things of themſelves hard to be underſtood; but moreover, thoſe very things are rendred more difficult, by the *Malice of Satan*, & the *Cunning of his Agents*. The Enemy hath ſown ſuch a prodigious quantity of *Tares*, that 'tis very hard ſometimes to find out the *Wheat*: What wonder then, if ſuch a ſpawn of Monſtrous Opinions flow from the Scriptures falling either into Prophane hands, or being interpreted by a private, ſelf conceited, and unruly Spirit? If St. *Paul*, who was caught up into the

the third Heavens, and was even oppreſs'd with *Revelations*; nevertheleſs cryes out, as well for the *Difficulty*, as the *Dignity* of his *Function*, Who is ſufficient for theſe things? Then certainly it can be no Diſparagement to the *Laity*, however quick-ſighted they may be in other Affairs, to ſuppoſe them not ſuch competent Judges here, as thoſe of the Clergy are. And indeed, we hear of very few, though never ſuch Deſpiſers of the dull Clergy in their life-time, but are very willing to admit of their adviſe and aſſiſtance when they come to *Dye*.

IV. Fourthly and laſtly, the neceſſity of this Submiſſion appears, as 'tis the only means to reſtore Peace and Unity to the Church; Happineſs and Tranquility to the State, how ineffectual the ſeveral Projects of *Comprehenſion*, *Toleration*, unwarrantable *Complyance* have prov'd to effect the *Work of Coalition*: I mean to Compoſe thoſe *Differences*, and unite thoſe *Diviſions* which ſo furiouſly *Rage* among us; we either are, or 'tis

'tis to be fear'd, by ſad Experience, may be Taught.

Theſe *Projects* can only lay claim to an Imaginary Happineſs, and how-ever Plauſible they may ſeem in the Notion, yet may they prove Dangerous in the Practiſe, at leaſt, not attain the ends for which they were deſign'd. For, in truth, as well may we expect *To gather Grapes from Thorns*, or *Figs from Thiſtles*, as that a *Toleration* of Diſagreements, ſhould produce the Bleſſed Fruits of Peace and Concord. Theſe are Contraries, and deſtroy each other.

Now, what other *Expedient* have we left but the Reſtoring, and Aſſerting the *Diſcipline of the Church*: That ſo they, who will neither *Hold the Faith, nor keep a good Conſcience, by being deliver'd up to Satan, may Learn, at leaſt, not to Blaſpheme.* Many and grievous are the Guilts, which are charg'd upon the Church of *Rome*; yet, ſuch is the *Exactneſs* of Her *Diſcipline*, and the *Obedience* of *Her Sons* and *Daughters*,

Conſequent upon it, as hath hitherto preſerv'd Her from Ruine. Now, if our Fears of the Increaſe of *Popery*, be as real, as they are pretended, me-thinks it ſhould be no ill Policy to learn Wiſdom from our Adverſaries; for that which preſerves a *Corrupted Church* from Falling, in all likely-hood will make a *Pure One* to Flouriſh.

However, We are little the better for being deliver'd from the *Slaveries* of an Implicit Faith, and Foreign *Superſtition*, if we run into *Licenciouſneſs*, *Infidelity*, and *Irreligion* at Home. For, who is ſo Blind as not to ſee that Irreverence and Diſreſpect for the *Lord's Clergy*, hath been accompanyed with a Manifeſt *Decay of Piety*, and a Notorious Contempt of the moſt Eſſential Parts of *Religion*? That want of Submiſſion, to the Juſt and Pious *Determinations of the Church*, no leſs Juſtly and Piouſly ratifyed and eſtabliſhed by the *King and State*, hath given Birth to ſuch a Monſtrous Variety of Opinions, as hath ſcarce left

left any Fundamental of the Faith unquestion'd, if not denyed; *Atheism* creeping in by Insensible Degrees, from indulging too great a Latitude in Matters of Religion.

And now in the Close of All, Let every Man seriously consider with himself the *Hainousness and Danger of Schism*; and the *Blessed Effects* of *Obedience*.

The Danger of Schism, in that it breaks the Precious *Unity of the Church*, alienates the Affections of the *Members* thereof. Who, as they have but one *Faith*, so they should have but one *Soul*. And so instead of *Love, Joy, Peace, Long-Suffering, Forbearance, Meekness, Temperance*, those lovely Fruits of the Spirit, which adorn Privat Men, and secure the Publick Peace, There arise *Hatred, Variance, Emulation, Wrath, Strife, Evil Surmising, Sedition, Heresies, Murders*; those ugly Works of the Flesh, which dissolve the Bonds of Society, and exclude Men from the Kingdom of

God. How that the *Schiſmatick* is arreſted with Fears and Jealouſies from without, when he conſiders his Sin of Diſobedience againſt thoſe whom the Lord hath ſet over him, and the *Dreadfulneſs* of the Churches Cenſures, when juſtly incur'd, for his Diſobedience. How that he is tormented with Sad and Uncomfortable Reflections from within; being *Unſtable in all his Ways, ever Learning, but never coming to the Knowledge of the Truth*; but being abandon'd to the *Deluſions* of a *Private Spirit*, He is miſerably toſt'd to and fro with every Wind of *Doctrine*, till at length He makes an Eternal *Shipwrack* of the *Faith*.

On the contrary, the Bleſſed Effects of *Obedience*; how the Humble Chriſtian, by an happy Reſignation of his Judgment, there where our Lord ſeems to demand it, enjoys a perpetual Peace, and Freedom from Diſpute, together with all his Fellow-Members of the ſame *Myſtical Body*. As for thoſe great *Myſteries of Godlineſs*, which

which concern his Salvation, though they are above his Reaſon, yet not above his Faith; & he had rather Rely on the Churches Deciſions of them, when he finds no place of Scripture, plainly contrary to ſuch Deciſions, than either give way to his own *Curioſity*, or heed to the *Diſputers* of this *World*, leſt He ſhould thereby *wreſt them to his own Deſtruction*. And this He thinks he may do with leſs Trouble to himſelf, and greater Aſſurance of the Truth, and ſo He continues Sound in the Faith, without being skill'd in thoſe unhappy Controverſies, in which the *Diſputers* of this World have involv'd it.

And this *Harmony* of *Faith* and *Doctrine* is always accompanied with an entire League, and Union of Charity, [that common Badge by which Chriſtians were once diſtinguiſh'd from the reſt of the World] and a Bleſſed *Uniformity* of God's Publick Worſhip and Service, whereby the Members of the *Church Militant*, in ſome ſort Re-

Reſemble the *Saints* of the *Church Triumphant*.

In a Word, in this Obedience, the Humble Chriſtian goes on Securely, and Chearfully, in the *Ways of God's Commandments*; And inſtead of troubling His Head with the συζητα of Religion, practiſeth thoſe Plain, but moſt Important Duties of *Godlineſs*, *Righteouſneſs*, & *Sobriety*; which will render his Life happy here, and Crown him with Eternal *Felicity*, hereafter.

FINIS.

ERRATA

PAge 13. line 2. for *Hypothecal* read *Hypothetical*. l. 10. f. *its* r. *the*. l. 11. f. *the* r. *its*.